

Ray and Pep's 1990 field study to locate our great-grandfather's Civil War farm in Emmanuel County, Georgia.

In 1988, Ray and I began a series of field trips to Georgia to search out our ancestral roots. We had previously spent several years, when we could find the time, researching our family's history. This required visits to the National Archives for census records and the Library of Congress for books on genealogy. Ray wrote the Mormons in Salt Lake City, and I wrote people in Georgia who helped us in our quests.

First, we journeyed to Lee County to trace the Pope family history. (Our mother was born Sara Pope.) The Pope family was gone from Lee County, but we learned that the Popes had been one of the prominent planter families of antebellum southwest Georgia. This story was written up at the time, as was that of our next trip to the southeastern part of the state to the region near the great Okefenokee Swamp to look for traces of our father's family.

We had some old family traditions and letters that spoke of the Martins who settled in those parts. We found the graveyard where our grandfather, William Ambrose Martin, and his wife, Mary Ellen (Molly) nee Woodard, were buried with our father's sister, Willie May Woodard. (The Woodards and the Martins were very close, and we were to see evidence of several marriages between the two families.) The burial place was just out of the village of Hoboken, Georgia. We knew that our father, Ira A. Martin, had been born there in 1888. (Ira A. Martin is covered in our first 1988 writeup.)

The present quest began when we realized that the Martins hadn't been living in the area above-described before grandfather William's time.

This fact came to light only after we met two cousins who still live near Hoboken. One, Eva Kate Ellis, 84 years old, remembered a great deal about her past, including her earlier childhood days, before the First World War, when our grandfather William was visited by his brother, whom she called "Uncle Nel." She remembered "Nel's" wife Lucy, who smoked a corn cob pipe. After much telling and retelling, she remembered that Uncle Nel had come from Emmanuel County. She also remembered him as having been "a soldier." We asked if he was a Civil War veteran, and she said she believed so. This information helped us crack a generation barrier in our Martin genealogy.

Back home for the next two years, we researched information learned on our trip. We soon learned that our grandfather William had grown up on a farm deep in the pine forest of Emmanuel County. This is a location 100 miles north of Hoboken and Ware County. Grandfather William (it now appears) left Emmanuel County and his father's farm about the time of his marriage to our grandmother, around 1870.

Ray and I learned from census records that our great-grandfather, James Martin, and our great-grandmother, Harriet, had raised a large family near Swainsboro, Georgia. Our great-grandmother died before 1860, and James remarried a woman a year older. During the Civil War, five of the sons enlisted in the Fifth Georgia Infantry, and all survived. They were, in 1860, James A.J. Martin, 24; Isaac W. Martin, 22; Nelson W. ("Uncle Nel") Martin, 17; John E. Martin, 15; and Dennis M. Martin, 13. Grandfather William was only 10 in 1860, so he never entered the service. This, then, was the extent of our knowledge of the Martin roots in Emmanuel County. (We did have information about some of the Martins—the Civil War

veterans, buried in Emmanuel County. We even had directions to the Emmanuel cemeteries.

Ray and I, who love Civil War history as much as family history, eventually decided to go to Emmanuel County and see what we could see. Tops, of course, was the fervent hope that we could find recognizable parameters of the Civil War farm, perhaps with the old house or remains. Next hope was to find some of the distant relatives, descendants of the great-uncles and -aunts, and lastly was to find the graves of ancestors—Martins.

April 23, 1990, found us in Statesboro, Georgia, 32 miles from our search area. (Our overnight accommodations were there.) We left the motel in Statesboro, Georgia (located on the old main road, one-third of the way from Savannah to Atlanta), heading west for an area a dozen miles south of Swainsboro. We scooted south and used the interstate to cover the 32 miles west to Emmanuel County and approached our search area from the south. We had absolutely no notion of what to expect. For dozens of miles before we reached our target, we found ourselves driving through endless forests of short-needled, tall Georgia pines. Even some areas of rare prime virgin timberland were visible from the interstate, but mostly they were replanted forests of varying ages. Farms were rare and small when seen. Farmhouses invariably were small, and they and their outbuildings were poor by Pennsylvania or Maryland standards. High barns were few, and all buildings seemed to sport the same type of rust-colored metal roofs. (In all fairness, there were exceptions, but these all probably were later additions.)

Leaving the four-lane road, we took a hard road four miles north to the town of Stillmore (mentioned as a cemetery site). The description “village” is more appropriate, as we saw only one spot of activity—a gas

station and convenience store enclave. After a brunch of hot dogs and soda, we polled the friendly young woman storekeeper. She was a native to the area and helped us find a "Warren Cemetery." She didn't seem to know about a large "Stillmore City Cemetery," however.

Returning in the direction we had entered the town, we took a fork in the hard road a half-mile south and found a three-acre fenced-in area containing many whose surnames were Warren. As our information indicated we should, we found our first Martin kin—John E. Martin, who died in 1919, and his wife Mary Jane and some of their children. John was one of the Confederate great-uncles. After an hour or so, we left the lovely, well cared-for enclosure and headed towards Swainsboro, 12 miles north. (Several cemeteries on our list were near there, and the storekeeper lady told us we could get a map of the county cemeteries there.)

At the Chamber of Commerce, we met a Tim Martin (not related), who was very interested in our project but had no maps. He sent us to a local undertaker, J. Gary Kurry, who was most gracious in sparing a full hour for us to write out detailed directions to the county burial sites we sought. One of the places near Swainsboro that we were most interested in was a Lexsy Cemetery. After leaving the town, we headed south on U.S. 1 to reach Lexsy, 11 miles distant.

Carefully watching for a road to the right, we saw no towns where Lexsy was supposed to be. Soon we had to U-turn and relook for the town. Driving slowly, we found one road junction, but there were only two boarded-up store structures to be seen. We remembered passing a small store coming down, a mile back, and as we were also quite thirsty, we went there.

This little store was to have a primary part in our story, though we never could have suspected it. It was just a little shack-like building that advertised beer and featured a supply of boxed and canned food as well as cold sodas and beer. A back room off to one side contained some tables where four or five local young men and a couple of older fellows were lounging. Behind the counter, we met and talked to a man of about 25, whom we quickly learned was a typical country dweller whose mind was a storehouse of local roads, homes, and people. When asked about a Lexsy Cemetery, he knew of the community burial acreage. (Lexsy, as a town or village, once tiny, was now just a ghost town except for some scattered residences.) The locals, except those with family graveyards, used The New Hope Primitive Baptist location, where a municipal cemetery has evolved from an old churchyard. This sounded interesting, but suddenly his eyes lit up. (He knew our family name at this point.) He said, "But you want to go to the Martin Cemetery." Ray and I looked at each other. "Martin Cemetery?" "Yes!" He then happily began reciting directions and other remarkable bits of information. "Go to the intersection." (Heading south again to Lexsy, the "junction" was really an intersection, but the left spur was just a single lane of sandy dirt.) "Turn left, go a half-mile, and turn right onto a road that branches off on an angle. You'll see some loggers working back in there. Go about another half of a mile. You'll pass the chimney of an old house on the left and a path in front of the old house. The Martin Cemetery is just beyond, about a hundred yards." Then he thought of something else. "As a matter of fact, that old road back there is called the Martin Road!"

Ray and I were now on cloud nine, as you might imagine, and it looked like we were close to our target—the Civil War home of our great-grandparents, but the fabric of the past had only just begun to unravel and to reveal the story of the Martins who developed far from the locations of our own family and that of our grandparents, but this was our roots! We left and headed towards the Martin Cemetery, jouncing and gliding through deep sand into the pine country. We saw no buildings after leaving the main road, and although we were only a couple of miles into the woods, it seemed quite like the deep forest. We passed the old house site and just glanced that way—just an old chimney, we thought. (Incidentally, our informant told us the old house had become, along with the surrounding land, part of the vast holdings of the Spivey National Bank of Swainsboro.) We found a cemetery with graves on both sides of the forest road.

The Martin Cemetery, so-called, contained no one we knew in the larger section, about half an acre (right side of the road), nor in the few unmarked slabs on the left side. We were crestfallen, to say the least; but the other cemetery offered hope, so we headed that way.

On the way out, we stopped at the old house site and gave it a good look-over. Having some idea of the size of the family of our great-grandparents, we tried to estimate the size of farm that had been at the house site. It appeared that land in the area that was mostly scrub pine was probably at one time part of a sizeable spread. The chimney shows traces indicating it belonged at one time to a two-story house with a gabled roof. The foundation pilings were of brick and indicated a dwelling of 30-foot sides surrounded by porches on three sides. It was big enough to be “our house” and farm. In the heavy brush in back, we found a barn in a great

state of preservation. It didn't look so very old, though, as did the house chimney. We then left the "farm" to find the Good Hope Cemetery.

Following our directions south on the main road, we crossed a creek and turned onto a dirt road leading off to the right that followed through farm country until it met another road in front of a brick suburban house. Turning right, we found the church and cemetery about a half-mile distant. Looking at the church, which was the second of the two in line, we returned to the near side of the cemetery, which was about five acres and chain-link fence enclosed. We entered the side gate. Feeling at that time a little "antsy," we quickly covered the spread and came up with nothing! It looked grim, but still we had some ideas, so we returned to headquarters—the store.

Our young friend had departed, and a fiftyish gent was in his place. He seemed to know all about us and told us that he was the father of our first informant. He also showed that lovely quality of southern people to immediately begin communicating with strangers as if they were lifelong acquaintances. He spoke of the property in the woods and the logging operation being performed quite near the old house. Loggers were removing timber with the powerful tree cutters that cut the trees and loaded them on huge log trailers. The trees we saw were quite old and large, worth a thousand dollars apiece delivered to the mill. We saw hundreds moved out in a two-day period, and the sound of the trees coming down and the great noise and dust clouds of the operation were background to our explorations. All of this was at the auspices of the Spivey owners. He mulled our situation over as he talked and then remembered an old lady, very wealthy, and whose memories in the area went back over 70 years. "Her name is Miz. May, and she lives in a house in back of the closed store buildings in

Lexsy. It's surrounded by a picket fence, and you can't miss it. She'll help you if anybody can. Tell her that Barney Marsh sent you." We thanked him, and in five minutes were ringing a bell on the porch of a well-manicured suburban-looking frame house. After some time, we realized that an old lady in a bathrobe was evaluating us from deep within the house. A screen door and about 30 feet of space separated us, so we called in to her. "Miss May, Barney Marsh sent us here. We are two Martin brothers researching our family's traces in the area. Could you tell us something about the Martins who have lived around here?" "Oh! Yes," she said, and came out on the porch and sat in a chair. (She wasn't feeling very well, we learned.)

The first question asked was, "Is that chimney and ruins of the old Martin place?" "Yes," she said very gently. Ray and I felt like jumping up and down, but we "cooled it" and continued. "Do you know who were the last Martins living there?" "Yes," she said, "It was Scenie." We recognized the name of one of J.A.J. Martin's descendants. She spoke of many things, and we learned the story of a grandmother (J.A.J.'s daughter) and a mother with a child trying to survive in a country place without men during the terrible depression years of the 1930s. Mrs. Jill Youmens May told of how her father, a prosperous businessman, used to take her back there to carry provisions to the destitute survivors of a once-large, busy farm family. Sceni married Rister somewhere along the way, and she had a sister Kitty and a brother James (called Jim). Kitty married Edenfield, and there was a son (living in the brick house near the Good Hope Church). Sceni, Kitty, and Jim are deceased. The grandmother was Mina. (She was well known to

us as one of J.A.J. Martin's younger daughters.) She told us to be sure and visit Kitty's son, James Edenfield. Then she remembered Rochelle.

"This is Sceni's daughter, who lives on the first dirt road on the way to the old Martin place. Instead of turning off, you continue on a quarter of a mile or so to a brick dwelling on the left." Mrs. May is a benefactress of the Good Hope Church, and we mentioned our fruitless visit to the cemetery there. "Well, the Martins are buried there," she said and gave us specific directions to their grave lot. (It is just inside the main gate on the right.) She told us that the hard road in front of her house that continued as the dirt road on the other side of U.S. 1 was an old railroad bed, and that the trains used to run half a mile from the Martins' property. In the other direction, it continued west and passed through Stillmore. In the teens, she used to ride the trains to school there. With the new information, and after offering our warmest wishes for her quick return to that hale and hearty feeling, we returned to Good Hope.

We immediately found the Martin descendants buried near the main gate. They were all in or near a shallow enclosure marked with the family name of Durden. Here, we found Mina (the grandmother) and her daughter Scenie, who married Rister. Here, we also found Florence Martin, another of J.A.J. Martin's daughters. Ray photographed the cemetery lot and its markers (as he also captured scenes from all of the points of interest. These lovely color prints are a treasure we shall always share.)

Upon leaving the cemetery, we retraced our steps back the short distance to the house where Mrs. May said we had a relative. Driving into this driveway, we were greeted by three enormous dogs, all barking loud warnings for us to remain in the car. We heeded. Before long, a man

looking to be in his late fifties appeared and calmed the dogs while waiting for us to state our business.

We mentioned Mrs. May and asked if he was related to any Martins. (The puppy dogs were relaxed now.) "Yes," he said, "my mother was a Martin; her name was Kitty." We then launched into a discussion of the Martins buried at the still-visible cemetery down the road. He knew them all and mentioned another there in an unmarked grave—J.A.J. Martin's son Jim, who died in recent years. Jim had a wife Ellen, and she is also there, he said. Kitty's full name was Kitty Curlie Martin Edenfield. Our informant was James Edenfield, born October 20, 1929. He has a sister, Margie Moore, who lives elsewhere in Georgia.

We left Edenfield feeling like we had definitely spoken to a Martin relative. Ray put it in words when he said, "He looks so much like our brother Eddie, doesn't he?" I certainly had no trouble agreeing, as it was quite a remarkable resemblance. The afternoon was waning as we left and thought about our next move. Ray talked me, ever the shy one, into driving back on the dirt road to look for Rochelle's house.

Trailing a cloud of dust, we reached the front of the brick house located for us by Mrs. May and turned into a driveway where we faced a pickup truck. The door of the house popped open, and out came a duo who seemed to be exact copies of each other, though of different generations. We launched into our "spiel," and to say the ice was broken quickly would be inaccurate—there was never any formed at all. We might as well have been close relatives who just happened by. When we mentioned the old "Martin place" and our collateral relationship to "James Martin," meaning our great-grandfather, the elder lady, who was Mrs. Rochelle Wren, widow,

replied, "His name was James A.J. Martin." We knew, of course, that she was referring to the Civil War veteran, our grandfather's brother, who was the eldest of the sons. Almost in unison at that point, Rochelle and her daughter of 35 years, Ellen, burst out with, "We've got his and his wife's pictures on our wall. They [the portraits] are over a hundred years old!"

In no time, we were inside their neat small ranch house and looking at a life-size picture of the face of a handsome, well-groomed young man of gleaming, angry eyes and high cheek bones. The collar of his Confederate uniform is clearly visible. What a find! Ray and I have shared both the love for family history and the history of the Civil War, and here they both came together. The other identically framed and glazed photo was another clear sharp picture taken about the same time of his wife, Elizabeth (nee Phillips). She was pretty and appeared slim. Their hair and handsome looks would blend easily into crowds of today without notice. We asked what J.A.J. stood for, and they didn't know. They also produced a picture of Mina, who was their grandmother and great-grandmother. It was not too old a picture, though the lady in it, standing at a country yard gate, was about 80 years old. (Later, we were able to give it a date of somewhere in the 1960s.) After getting a promise to be allowed to copy the pictures in black and white (my camera would be used), we arranged with them to return the next day. We then mentioned our unsuccessful search of the graves near the old house—the so-called Martin Cemetery. They both nearly shouted, "J.A.J.'s in there and his wife." We demurred, though we tried to be tactful. We suggested that someone must have removed the grave markers (if there were any). Ellen would not be deterred. She knew exactly where the graves were—in a thickly grown-up area near the cemetery clearing. "A big tree fell and broke

his stone, but it's still there with the pieces." She then gave us minute instructions on how to find the graves. We then drove to the "Martin" acreage again.

This time, walking along the edge of dense growth and peering into the gloom, I was finally able to see what looked like a short stump of a tree about 30 yards into the woods. Working my way through, I called out to Ray. He had also been converging in the woods on this spot, and there it was, just as described by Ellen. J.A.J. Martin's marker, of a dark granite, was broken in three pieces. Next to him, in the classic grave arrangement, was another, broken off near the base with no evidence found of the inscribed part. Of course, this was the grave of Elizabeth. Who else? Only the name of James A.J. Martin was clear. Dates were obscured, but a poignant message, inscribed on a stone-covered slab, almost hidden below ground, gave us pause and a thickening of the throat:

The light from our home is gone.
A voice we loved is stilled.
A place is vacant in our hearts
That can never be filled.

This ended our first day's exploring, so we happily returned to our motel base in Statesboro.

The next morning, we drove back to the convenience store in Stillmore for brunch again. Afterwards, using the directions from the friendly undertaker of Swainsboro, we quickly found the Stillmore Cemetery. Coming from the south, a left turn is made just prior to a place called Johnson's Store on the right, in Stillmore. Follow this road west out of town a mile or so and the Stillmore City(?) Cemetery is on the right. It is also chain-link surrounded and appears to be about 10 acres. We never had

any problems finding our dead relatives. Dennis M. Martin, one of the Confederate brothers, is buried there with his wife MaryAnn, and lots of descendants in a large, finely monumented lot. (This cemetery is also beautifully maintained.) While Ray laboriously photographed every marker, I went looking for another of the soldier brothers reportedly buried there—Isaac. He was found about 50 yards from Dennis, as was his wife Julia. We then drove over to Lexsy again.

Rochelle and Ellen were awaiting us, and we talked of family while I used my black-and-white film and close-up lens to copy the wall portraits of J.A.J. and Elizabeth. (They even consented to the taking of brads from the back of the framed portraits to remove the pictures from beneath the glass.) I placed them outside on the porch and copied them. Other family pictures were produced, and I clicked away until I ran out of film. We then asked if they wanted to accompany us back to the Martin Place for a final look-over.

When we reached the old farm site, we had to be careful that we left the single-lane, deep sand road open, as the huge log transporters were sailing through from the cutting site, at high speed, enveloped in clouds of dust. Rochelle explained the meanings of details we hadn't noticed. There was a shallow trench around the "house" that was used as a firebreak. On the chimney, outside of the house, there was the number—1876. This, she explained, had been authorized by one of J.A.J.'s daughters, Florence.

Rochelle then took us to a spot on the property where she had lived in a tiny dwelling as a child with her mother Sceni and grandmother Mina. She never lived in the bigger house. Parting at the site with the women (they brought their own vehicle), we then decided to return to Swainsboro to seek out the land records.

At the office of the Clerk of the Court, we were soon juggling the heavy land transaction books. Our efforts were rewarded. We learned that James Martin (our great-grandfather) had originally 400 acres. We found his will and learned that he was married to his third wife Mary in 1879, when he wrote his will. She was 35 and he 77. The will, as was the custom, passed the bulk of the inheritance on to the eldest son, "James Andrew Jackson Martin." (Now we knew!) The remainder of the estate, mostly land, was to be divided among the other children, including any born of his third wife Mary, before his death or after, "during the period of normal gestation." (This became a fact in 1880 when a one-month-old daughter Harrin was recorded as one of James' family.)

After copying the will and some land transactions, we concluded our marvelous sojourn through history and the beautiful skyscraper pines of north central Georgia with a run-by of Rochelle's home. Ray's camera captured the sight of the old "privy" from the farm, now saved and used as a storage shed.